

EXTRACT

FROM

THE ANNUAL ADDRESS

OF THE

RT. REV. THOMAS ATKINSON, D. D.,

TO THE

Convention of the Diocese

OF

NORTH CAROLINA,

HOLDEN AT

WILMINGTON, July 10th, 1861.



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EXTRACT.

BRETHREN OF THE CLERGY AND LAITY :

The time and place at which we are assembled, admonish us that strange and unexpected events have occurred since we separated, last year. We then adjourned to meet again in New Berne, on the third Wednesday in May, and we now find ourselves assembled in Morganton, on the second Wednesday in July. This change of the place and time of holding the Convention, was directed by me, in consequence of my being informed by the Rector of the Church in New Berne, that, hostilities having commenced between our State and the Government of the United States, many of the male members of his congregation were absent on military duty, and most of the females engaged in occupations made necessary by the same state of things, and that, consequently, they were not in a condition to receive the Convention. I then thought of our session being held at Raleigh, or Fayetteville; but I found the Rectors of both these Parishes were hindered by the same difficulties, and as it was important that the Convention should meet, I appointed this place as being accessible, healthy, and as free from political disturbance as any in the State, while, as this body had never met here before, I trusted that its doing so now, might be useful to the Church.

The same state of things that made necessary the postponement of our meeting, induced me to issue Forms of Prayer for the People of the Confederate States and for the Soldiers gone to War; and also caused me to recommend to the Clergy, in the use of the Prayer for our Civil Rulers, to make their petitions for the Governor of this Commonwealth, and when it became one of the Confederate States, for the President of those States, instead of the President of the United States, he having ceased to be our Civil Ruler; and

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the other having become so. I felt justified in making this recommendation, because it is clearly the meaning of the Church, to pray for those actually in authority over us, as indeed the Scriptures prescribe, and not those who are, at the time, exercising an authority hostile to the community in which we live and labor. And it seemed clear that what was thus done should be uniform through the Diocese, and should be done under the direction of the Bishop, to whom the regulation of the Liturgy belongs, by the principles and practice of the Primitive Church.

I mention this to show that I did not then, as I do not now, entertain the view, which many hold, that the severance of the National Union does, of itself, and without any act of the Church, produce a disruption of the bonds which bind our Dioceses together. This is a matter, in itself, of so much importance, and is likely to furnish so controlling and, it seems to me, so dangerous a precedent for the future, that it ought to be very carefully considered, before we adopt the conclusion just now stated, recommended, though it be, by persons for whom we all have the sincerest respect.

The question is not, you observe, what may these Southern Dioceses, rightfully and wisely, do ; but, what is the effect on them, willing or unwilling, of what others have done? It is clearly wise, and even necessary, that the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States shall be greatly modified, perhaps it may be necessary that it shall cease to exist as one Church. But, that is not the matter before us now. We have first to decide, not whether we shall modify or destroy that Church but, whether there is such a Church now in existence. If the Diocese established in the States which have seceded, are no longer a part of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States ; are, indeed, no longer a part of any ecclesiastical organization ; but are separate and independent, each of the other, and each of the rest of Christendom ; how has this very important change been brought about? Not by their own act : for those which have acted in recognition of their Diocesan

isolation, only profess to recognize an existing fact, not to make the fact. They do not separate from the other Dioceses; they declare themselves to have been already separated by the acts of the States within whose limits they have been organized. What were those acts? The secessions of these States from the Political Union, of which they had previously formed a part. If, then, this cause produce this effect now, it will produce it hereafter. Take, for example, the case of any one of our Dioceses. It is formed within a State, the population of which is generally alien to our Church, not hostile, perhaps, but indifferent, not recognizing its authority, of course, not concerned to advance its growth, or to preserve its principles. Within this mass of population, most of whom are attached to some form of Protestant Dissent, some of whom are Roman Catholics, a few of whom are Jews, and some rejectors of all revealed religion, we have a few congregations, amounting, in the most favored Dioceses, to not a tenth of the whole number of the people, in others to not a hundredth. Does the action of such a body politic determine, *ipso facto*, without the Church being consulted, without its action, without any expression of its will, perhaps against its will, what shall be its relations to its sister Dioceses and, through them, to the Churches in alliance with our own, to its Missions Foreign and Domestic, to the General Seminary, and to its entire Code of Canon Law, other than that which is merely Diocesan? And, in coming to our conclusions on this subject, two things must be borne in mind. First: That according to the theory that secession in the State produces a disruption of the Church, each Diocese in the seceding States is relegated to a condition of absolute isolation and independence. The Diocese of North Carolina is no more united to that of South Carolina, than that of New York, or of London. Each stands alone in Christendom; a position I believe to be without precedent in Church History, from the Apostles' time downwards, except, perhaps, when the ban of excommunication was laid on a Diocese. Its results must be, to deprive our Bishops and

Delegates of their rights to seats in the General Convention, in the Board of Missions, and in the Board of Trustees of the General Seminary. Another of its results, according to the view generally taken among us of Canon Law, not, I admit, my own view, still the more common one—according to this view, I say, another result of the secession of the States would be, the abrogation and repeal of all the Laws of the Church, except Diocesan Canons, and that, too, without any action of the Diocese. For, it has been generally thought that, our Ecclesiastical Independence of England, abrogated the authority of the English Canon Law over the American Church. By parity of reasoning, it would then follow that, our separation from the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, abrogates the authority of the Constitution and Canons of that Church over us. In that case, it is very doubtful whether the use of the Book of Common Prayer is binding on us, for that is made binding by Article VIII. of the Constitution of the General Church.

In what confusion, then, are we left? Who knows what laws we have, or whether we have any laws but our Local Canons. And all this is imagined to have been brought about by a political measure, as to which the Church was not consulted and, indeed, could not well be consulted. Suppose that this result which some think has been brought about by implication, had been attempted, avowedly and expressly. Suppose that any Political Body in North Carolina had passed a decree which undertook, “*proprio vigore*,” to separate this Diocese from every other in Christendom, to take away the right of its Bishop and Delegates to seats in the General Convention, the Board of Missions, and the General Seminary, to confiscate its interest in the property held by these bodies, and to abrogate all its most solemn laws and regulations, what should we think of the stupendous injustice and tyranny of such an ordinance. No one, probably, would maintain that it was binding on us, without any act, or vote, or thought, or will of our own. Yet, shall

we say that, what could not be done directly, has been done indirectly? Would not this be, to make the Church the mere shadow of the State, its slave, and not its fellow-worker ; that State withal, not being in union with the Church, not composed of the same individuals as the Church, as is the supposition in England, where the State exercises so much power over the Church ; but, in our case, the State being altogether alien from the Church, and acknowledging, in no degree, its claims, or authority. Of course, I know that the State is not thinking of us, does not wish to tyrannize over us, or to exercise any power over us ; but, the question is, does it really exercise this prodigious power, by virtue of principles and facts embodied in the subject itself. I think, it does not, and that it would be worse for the State, as well as the Church, if it did. The State, then, in taking its action, instead of having only to deliberate on what was best for the people in their temporal interests, would find this other and most perplexing question forced upon it,—What is due to the Church, and what is best for it, in its spiritual character and relations?

I said, that, there were two things which deserve to be considered by us, in making up our judgment on this mighty question. The first I have stated. The second is this: That, if Political separation do, without any action of the Church, produce Ecclesiastical Disruption, we lose all control over ourselves, in our Church Relations, for the future. Suppose the Dioceses in the Confederate States form an United Church, as, no doubt, they will, and that one of these States should afterwards secede from the Confederacy, then the Diocese, in that State, will be cut off, whether she wish it or no, from the Southern Church. Then the Church, throughout all time, will have her relations settled for her by men not necessarily of her Communion, perhaps, by men hostile to her, and anxious to destroy her. Was it ever heard before, that the Church of Christ was under such bondage ! The relations of Church and State do, beyond doubt, sometimes present practical difficulties. But, those difficulties will be least and fewest, if we adhere rigidly to

the great principle of the mutual Independence of these two societies. This is the American, this is the Scriptural and Primitive principle, which equally forbids the Church to control the State, as Ultramontane Papists demand, and the State to control the Church, as has been, to some extent, permitted in England. Church and State, although both are appointed by God, and both necessary for man, are yet entirely distinct organizations; distinct in the authority which frames them, the one being Human, the other Divine; distinct in the power which secures the execution of their laws, the one being Force, the other Conscience; distinct in their objects, those of the one being Temporal Happiness, those of the other Eternal Felicity. Their only point of contact is that the persons whom they govern are, to some extent, although by no means entirely, the same; the members of the Church being all citizens of the State, but the citizens of the State being, by no means, all members of the Church.

It is one function of the Church to uphold the State, by its Prayers, and by insisting on obedience to it as a Christian duty. The State is always entitled to our Prayers and our obedience, unless she undertake to set aside the Law of Christ, in which case, we must obey God rather than man. But the State has a right to form her own government, and then the Church, in that State, must respect and sustain that government. If, then, we individually censured the Acts by which North Carolina seceded from the American Union, and established a Government for herself, and afterwards adopted the Government of the Confederate States, still, as a Church, we must have acknowledged, prayed for, and obeyed that Government; for, as to us, its officers are "the powers that be," whom St. Paul bids us obey. Happily, however, for our peace of mind, we have had no perplexing questions of the sort to settle. By the time the State acted, her citizens had become nearly unanimous in the conviction that she must adopt the policy which she has pursued. The duty of the Church in this Diocese, to the State, is then clear. The only question is, what is her duty to herself? Is she to regard the Ecclesiastical system of which she formed a part, as dissolved by the act of the State, without any action of her own; or, is she to consider it as still subsisting, and liable to be abolished, or modified, as she, after deliberate inquiry and consultation, shall see best? This is a question, the decision of which involves the right to property of considerable amount, and what is in-

comparably more important, principles of great weight, and liable to frequent application in the future.

So far as I understand the reasoning of those respected brethren, from whose view I am compelled to dissent, it all rests upon this notion, that conditions which, if they existed at the time, would *prevent* an union of Dioceses, will, if they should subsequently arise, destroy that union. These brethren seem to have a chain of propositions of this sort to pass through their minds. First: That the Confederate States are now a foreign country to the United States. This I grant. Second: That a Diocese in a foreign country could not be received into union with the Church in the United States. This is not so clear: The Right Reverend Doctors BOONE and PAYNE are Bishops of that Church, exercising Episcopal functions, and possessing jurisdiction under its authority and liable to its discipline. If Dioceses were established at Shanghai and Cape Palmas, I see no hindrance, either in our Constitution or Church principles, to these Dioceses being received into union with the Church in the United States. Her name of Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, does not confine her field to the United States; otherwise, she would be condemned, by her very Constitution, to perpetual sterility of all missionary fruit. And if she may rightfully have, as she actually has, Bishops and other ministers and congregations, out of the United States, it is difficult to see why they may not be arranged in the form of Dioceses, if that form should be more convenient than the present one, as indeed it must be, if our Missions shall go on to prosper. The name of the Church of England does not hinder that Church from having Dioceses beyond the bounds of Great Britain. But, if we grant that a Diocese in a foreign country could not be *received* into union with the Church in the United States, it does not follow that if the State in which that Diocese is established, having once been a part of the United States, became a foreign country, the Church necessarily ceases to be a part of the Church of the United States. To suppose this, is to confound conditions precedent with conditions subsequent, and they are very far from being the same. Take this example. By Article V. of the Constitution of the Church in the United States, a new Diocese cannot be formed within the limits of an existing one, without the consent of the Bishop and Convention of the latter. Suppose such consent given, and the Diocese formed, and there

the consent withdrawn, no one would contend that, thereby, the new Diocese was dissolved. The consent is necessary as a condition precedent to the formation of the Diocese; but is not necessary as a condition subsequent to its formation, in order to its continuance. So, to be within the United States may be necessary as a condition precedent to the union of a Diocese with the Church of the United States, but may not be necessary to a continuance of that union. Again, to make a new Diocese within the limits of an existing one, requires fifteen self-supporting Parishes, and thirty in the old: Suppose this condition to be complied with, and the number of such Parishes, afterwards, to fall below the assigned limit in either Diocese, are both, or is either dissolved thereby? Surely not. Yet the union could not begin to exist under the circumstances in which, when once formed, it may continue to exist.

While then, I see insuperable objections to the acceptance of the Theory that; the secession of the State does, without any act of the Church, produce a disruption of the Church, I see no plausible argument to incline one to accept it. At the same time, some very important changes in our relations with the Northern Dioceses will be necessary, and it may be best to form an entirely new Ecclesiastical system: This ought to be done with the utmost possible forethought and deliberation. Changes in the Liturgy, made necessary by our altered circumstances, may be made, I conceive, under the authority of the Bishops, as in the case of services for Missionary congregations, and of third services, and the like.

Whether we shall be represented; or not, in the next General Convention, is altogether a question addressed to our discretion. However decided, it will not affect our relations with that body. It ought to be decided after consultation with the Bishops and Delegates of all the Dioceses within the seceded States, who will meet, I am informed; in a short time, for the purpose of deliberation on this and kindred subjects. I recommend to the Convention, the appointment of Clerical and Lay Delegates to represent the Diocese at this meeting.

And when the Congress of the Confederate States, which has now become our supreme Legislature, shall meet, I recommend to the Clergy to offer, in behalf of that body, the Prayer heretofore in use for the Congress of the United States:



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